



02 Switzerland
Space to think

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PHOTOGRAPHY by Gaia Cambiaggi

Switzerland's Val Bregaglia may not have the name recognition of the Upper Engadine but the narrow valley does have its fair share of scenic mountain landscapes to help visitors clear their heads of urban stress. In the village of Castasegna on the border with Italy, a one-time family home has been recast as an Alpine retreat for visiting academics, artists and architects.

Built in 1863, Villa Garbald is the work of German architect Gottfried Semper. He was commissioned by the town's then chief customs officer to design a three-storey residence that would provide a vantage point from which to keep an eye on those crossing the frontier. Turned into a foundation by the owner's heirs, the villa was restored in 2004 by Basel practice Miller & Maranta, which converted the property into a hotel. It now hosts workshops for up to 16 people and is regularly used by professors from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Semper designed part of its campus too) in Zürich.

Preservation was top priority for the architects when they drew up the plans. They installed windows based on the original design and stripped the white paint that had been applied more recently to the walls. "We didn't want to make it feel too new but instead maintain the spirit of the house," says architect Quintus Miller. The original pine floorboards in the bedrooms and granite used in the entryway and stairs quickly communicate to guests the comforting signs of wear and use.

En suite bathrooms were not an option since it meant knocking down walls. Instead, boarders cross the hallway to bathe in freestanding showers. The most radical makeover took place downstairs, where the laundry room was converted into a dining area with a cosy fireplace. Seated around a table made from chestnut, lodgers tuck into spätzle, sip Pinot Noir from Canton Graubünden and finish their meal with fruit torte made with apricots grown in the grounds. After dinner, guests retire to a library filled with volumes on subjects ranging from beekeeping to Buddhism that are stored in custom-made bookcases.

Since the house had just four rooms, the architects added a five-sided tower on the northeast corner of the sloping plot to house 10 guestrooms. "We reduced the footprint so it wouldn't intrude on the villa." Spiral steps lead up to rooms, which are numbered in a Fibonacci sequence, and finish at an observation nook with panoramic views.

Its concrete façade, made with gravel from the local riverbed, was blasted with water jets. "We wanted to give the building the same patina as the property's old stone wall to better integrate it."

Furnishings were kept to a minimum: a low bed frame, a desk and wardrobe. Chairs are re-editions from classic Swiss manufacturer Horgen Glarus. Oversized windows with larch frames feature wooden slot blinds that open to reveal idyllic views – scenes that help to collect one's thoughts and, hopefully, provide inspiration. — (M)

garbald.ch



Top five places
Best escapes for landscape and culture

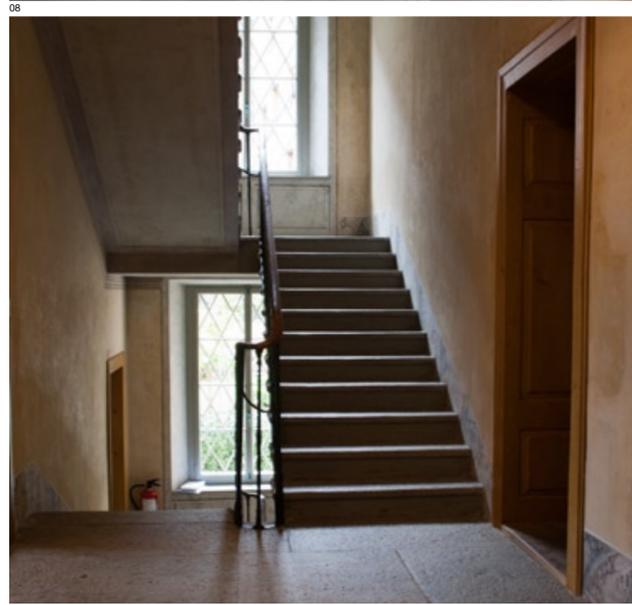
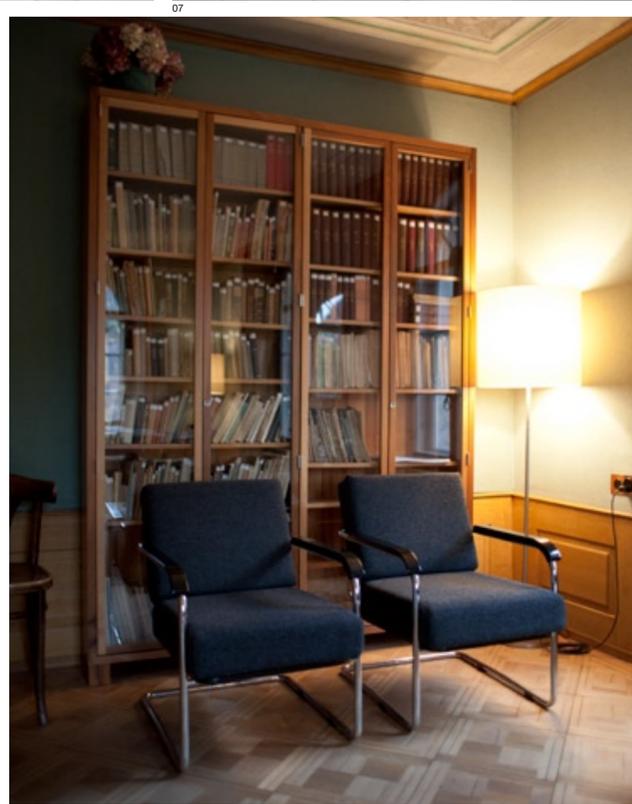
01 Le Massif, Quebec, Canada
We have a giant meteorite to thank for Le Massif, one of the world's most beautiful ski resorts. Overlooking the St Lawrence river, the 48 trails all offer spectacular views over the water. Its geological origins aren't the only unusual thing about Le Massif; the president and CEO of Groupe Le Massif is none other than the co-founder of Cirque du Soleil, Daniel Gauthier. He has invested €167m in the resort, expanding and improving the runs with sustainable development at the project's core. Thanks to this sensitive approach Le Massif has that rare balance of luxury appeal and local charm.

02 The Cedars, Eastern Lebanese Mountains, Lebanon
The Cedars, or Al Arz, is a favourite with well-heeled Beirut families looking for some winter snow and to escape the humidity in summer. A few hours' drive north east of the capital, the town is notable for the ancient cedar forests that give it its name as well as the cliffs, caves and monasteries of the Kadisha Valley. A mix of Middle Eastern and European architecture, The Cedars and the nearest large town, Bsharri, are increasingly popular with an international crowd of visitors.

03 Niseko, Niseko Mountain Range, Japan
Niseko, on Hokkaido, is the town of choice for those who want to avoid the bustle of Japan's better-known ski resort, Karuizawa. Niseko is celebrated for having the best powder snow in the world and attracts an international crowd of enthusiasts. As well as world-class skiing, the town has excellent restaurants and the onsen are some of the finest in the country. Niseko's rolling hills, dominated by Mount Yotei, provide an excellent escape in summer and winter.

04 San Carlos de Bariloche, Andes, Argentina
In the foothills of the Argentinian Andes, San Carlos de Bariloche is surrounded by lakes and is almost as famous for its beaches (and ice-cold swimming) as its skiing. Far closer to the Chilean border than it is to Buenos Aires, the city is more laid back than the gaucho capital. The architecture of the town, notable for its wood cabins, as well as waves of German-speaking immigrants, has earned it the name "Little Switzerland".

05 Belluno, Dolomites, Italy
A charming city in north-eastern Italy, Belluno sits between the Santa Croce lake and the foothills of the Dolomite mountains. Despite its Alpine feel, it has its own micro-climate, protected by the mountains against the cold winds from the north. The city is just a few kilometres away from the Nevegal ski resort, illuminated for night skiing and within an hour's drive of the more demanding slopes at Civetta. This small city with its mixed Austrian and Venetian heritage is a knot of winding streets, vibrant palazzi, hidden corners and a lively main corso. — (D)M



- The villa**
01 Library reading area
02 Guestroom with pine flooring
03 Villa with the vegetable garden (side view)
04 The original Kachelofen (a masonry heater)
05 View of Castasegna
06 Dining room
07 Desk in the library
08 Library
09 Staircase in granite
- The new tower**
10 Antique camera belonging to the Garbald family
11 Concrete tower designed by Miller & Maranta
12 Simple guestroom for visiting professionals
13 Corridor with a picture window
14 Bathroom



Top of the range architects
Who to call

01 Renato Maurizio, Switzerland
Maurizio's St Moritz firm is our choice for the ultimate Lower Engadine residence. His rugged stone walls provide a sturdy support for his massive roofs, which in turn give his buildings an elegant, polished look even on snowy days. His beautiful properties are a mix of traditional and contemporary that blends perfectly with the Swiss Alps. swiss-architects.com/fr/maurizio

02 Atelier Bow-Wow, Japan
Japanese maverick Atelier Bow-Wow, established in Tokyo in 1992, does a good line in unusual houses that are aesthetic and interesting but don't compromise practicality or comfort. Large windows and copious light are recurring features together with unexpected façades that provide views of the Japanese mountains from a number of angles. Perfect for our bolthole in the heights of Hokkaido. bow-wow.jp

03 Dualchas, Scotland
Twin brothers Neil and Alasdair Stephen, behind Scottish firm Dualchas, build idyllic homes that are part Highland hideaway, part Scandinavian cabin. With a commitment to sustainability, Dualchas is who we'd head to for a wind-swept retreat, drawing into our plans enough deck area to watch the winter sunsets while wrapped in a blanket with a strong hot toddy. dualchas.com

04 Cadaval & Solà-Morales, Spain and Mexico
We were won over by the Barcelona and Mexico City-based Cadaval & Solà-Morales' first residence in the Pyrenees. It's an impressive conversion of a dry stone house – hence it's our go-to firm for a Spanish mountain pad. Its sculptural designs and open-plan interiors are perfect to create the fiesta ambience in winter – precisely what we'd need for entertaining guests in the hills. ca-so.com

05 AllesWirdGut, Austria
Because the wild of the mountains can at times be too much, we'd want a classic Innsbruck townhouse to escape to. And who better to commission than AllesWirdGut, the firm that recently pedestrianised Innsbruck's city centre. alleswirdgut.cc — SRT

